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ABSTRACT

The importance of diagnostic testing for appropriate student placement at open door colleges is discussed, along with approaches to upgrade teacher skills. It is suggested that colleges typically select students who are skilled and motivated enough to acquire knowledge by the approaches currently offered, and that colleges thus act as screeners rather than educational institutions. After identifying skills in which students are deficient and effective learning modes for each student, the next step is to prescribe a study program to help a student achieve a specified skill level. To promote proper student placement, detailed information about course content and prerequisite skills should be provided to academic advisers. Workshops for advisers should acquaint them with available resources as well as techniques for using detailed diagnostic information in planning students' programs. Also essential is a mandatory and ongoing program to upgrade the teaching skills of faculty through the use of trained evaluators. Outstanding teachers in each department could be identified and provided training and release time for ongoing teacher improvement activities within their department. Teaching improvement activities should be coordinated by a central office that provides training and resource information. (SW)

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Is Higher Education an Educational Process or a Screening Process?

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Is Higher Education an Educational Process or Screening Process?

By Martin Blake

In the past few years, the American people have become increasingly concerned about the issue of basic skills. This concern is reflected in the numerous magazine and newspaper articles on this topic which have appeared recently in the popular press. One common misconception is that the basic skill problem is a new one. This is definitely not the case. As early as 1828, the Yale Report called for an end to the admission of students with "defective preparation." Other sources also indicate that nineteenth century American colleges and universities admitted students considered to be far below acceptable college level standards (Brier, p. 2).

What is the nature of this problem that has afflicted our institutions of higher learning for almost 200 years? There are two elements to this problem, one a student element and the other a faculty element. To address the student element of the basic skills problem, we must first clarify what we mean by basic skills. In a progress report submitted to the NMSU Faculty Senate on May 1, 1984, the Ad Hoc Committee on Basic Skills characterized basic skills as the ability "to write, calculate, think, read with comprehension, and, generally, to operate effectively in the university." The problem is not that some students are totally lacking one or more of these skills. The problem is that they do not possess one or more of these skills to the degree assumed by professors in the university who teach freshman courses. Such assumptions about entry skill levels are a necessity in the absence of proper data about entering students.

The student element of the basic skills problem is that students are individuals who have varying degrees of proficiency in what have been identified as the basic skills. When their proficiency in these areas is measured against the prerequisite skills assumed by professors in their courses, some of the students are judged to be insufficiently prepared or lacking the basic skills. Thus, one of the key elements of the basic skills problem is that professors' assumption about students' skill levels are not tested before the course but are judged after the fact. There is no diagnosis before entry into a course which could be used to determine if a student were improperly placed.

THE FACULTY ELEMENT OF THE BASIC SKILLS PROBLEM IS THAT MANY PROFESSORS HAVE NOT MASTERED THE BASIC SKILLS OF TEACHING. THEY HAVE NOT CLEARLY DEFINED THE OBJECTIVES IN THEIR COURSES OR THE PREREQUISITE SKILLS WHICH STUDENTS NEED TO ATTAIN THESE OBJECTIVES SUCCESSFULLY. MOST PROFESSORS WOULD BE HARD PRESSED TO ARTICULATE THE SKILLS THEY IMPLICITLY ASSUME THAT STUDENTS IN THEIR COURSES POSSESS. MANY PROFESSORS LACK THE ABILITY TO PROPERLY MOTIVATE STUDENTS OR EFFECTIVELY ORGANIZE A LECTURE AND HAVE NOT MASTERED THE BASIC CLASSROOM TECHNIQUES OF HOLDING STUDENTS' ATTENTION DURING A PRESENTATION. LACKING SOME OF THE BASIC TEACHING SKILLS, THEY PRESENT THEIR MATERIAL TO THE STUDENTS TO THE BEST OF THEIR ABILITY AND THOSE STUDENTS WHO DO NOT SUCCEED ARE VIEWED AS LACKING THE BASIC SKILLS.

WHEN YOU GET TO THE BOTTOM LINE, THE BASIC SKILLS PROBLEM BOILS DOWN TO AN EDUCATIONAL ORGANIZATION WHICH IS INSUFFICIENTLY FLEXIBLE TO MEET THE NEEDS OF ITS CLIENTELE. IF WE WERE TRULY CONCERNED ABOUT EDUCATING STUDENTS, WE WOULD CONCENTRATE OUR EFFORTS MORE ON DIAGNOSING A STUDENT'S CURRENT LEVEL OF ATTAINMENT, PRESCRIBING A COURSE OF STUDY TO RAISE THE STUDENT'S SKILLS TO SOME DESIRED LEVEL AND EFFECTIVELY CARRYING OUT THIS PRESCRIPTION. IN REALITY, OUR INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION MORE CLOSELY RESEMBLE SCREENING PROCESSES. A SCREENING PROCESS EVALUATES STUDENTS' ABILITIES AND ELMINATES ALL THOSE WHO FALL BELOW SOME GIVEN LEVEL. THROUGH SCREENING, WE SELECT A GROUP OF STUDENTS WHO ARE SUFFICIENTLY SKILLED AND MOTIVATED THAT THEY CAN ACQUIRE KNOWLEDGE IN THE MANNER IN WHICH WE CURRENTLY OFFER IT. THIS APPROACH IS BEST TYPIFIED BY THE OFTEN HEARD QUOTE ABOUT "WEEDING OUT THOSE WHO ARE NOT TRULY COLLEGE MATERIAL." LOOKING AT SOME RECENT DATA, IT SEEMS AS THOUGH WE MAY BE WEEDING A LITTLE HEAVY. TO DATE, ONLY 37 PERCENT OF THE ENTERING FRESHMAN CLASS IN 1976 HAVE GRADUATED FROM NMSU WITH BACCALAUREATE DEGREES. THE FACT THAT WE CAN EFFECTIVELY MEET THE NEEDS OF ONLY FOUR OUT OF EVERY TEN STUDENTS WHO TURN TO US SHOULD INDICATE THAT THERE IS SOMETHING DRASTICALLY WRONG WITH OUR SYSTEM. IN THE PAST, OUR CURRENT FAILURE RATES WERE TOLERATED BY SOCIETY. HOWEVER, WITH SOCIETY'S INCREASING NEED FOR SKILLED PEOPLE, I DOUBT WHETHER SUCH FAILURE RATES WILL CONTINUE TO BE VIEWED AS ACCEPTABLE.

THE FIRST SECTION OF THE 1984 ADMINISTRATIVE POLICIES AND PROCEDURES OF NEW MEXICO STATE UNIVERSITY DEALS WITH THE MISSIONS, GOALS, AND OBJECTIVES OF THE UNIVERSITY. IT EXPRESSES A COMMITMENT TO AN OPEN DOOR POLICY AND A BELIEF THAT EVERYONE HAS THE RIGHT TO THOSE OPPORTUNITIES FOR PERSONAL GROWTH WHICH A BROAD EDUCATION PROVIDES. IT STATES THAT "THE PRIMARY DUTY OF THE UNIVERSITY IS TO EDUCATE. AS THE LAND GRANT INSTITUTION OF NEW MEXICO, NEW MEXICO STATE UNIVERSITY IS COMMITTED TO SERVING THE EDUCATIONAL NEEDS OF A STUDENT BODY OF VARIOUS AGES, INTERESTS, AND CULTURAL BACKGROUNDS." HOWEVER, THERE IS A LARGE DIVERGENCE BETWEEN OUR STATED MISSION AND THE WAY IN WHICH WE ACTUALLY OPERATE.

WHEN WE EMPLOY SCREENING TACTICS, WE ARE EXPRESSING OUR BASIC DISAGREEMENT WITH THE OPEN DOOR POLICY. WE DO NOT STAND READY TO ACCOMMODATE THE VARYING SKILL LEVELS THAT STUDENTS OF DIFFERENT AGES, INTERESTS, AND CULTURAL BACKGROUNDS PRESENT US.

IF WE ARE TO BEHAVE ETHICALLY, WE EITHER NEED TO CHANGE OUR MISSION TO MEET OUR ACTIONS OR CHANGE OUR ACTIONS TO MEET OUR MISSION. IF WE DECIDE TO CHANGE OUR MISSION, WE MUST SET ADMISSIONS STANDARDS WHICH GIVE REASONABLE ASSURANCE THAT ALL THOSE WHO MEET THESE STANDARDS HAVE A GOOD CHANCE OF SUCCESSFULLY COMPLETING A BACCALAUREATE DEGREE PROGRAM. HOWEVER, SINCE WE ARE A LAND GRANT UNIVERSITY AND HAVE A HISTORY OF HAVING AN OPEN ADMISSIONS POLICY, WE MAY FIND IT DIFFICULT TO CHANGE OUR MISSION.

THE OTHER ALTERNATIVE IS TO CHANGE OUR ACTIONS TO MEET OUR MISSION. SINCE THE BASIC SKILLS PROBLEM CONTAINS BOTH STUDENT AND FACULTY ELEMENTS, SO MUST THE SOLUTION. TO ADDRESS THE STUDENT ELEMENT OF THE BASIC SKILLS PROBLEM, WE MUST DO A BETTER JOB OF EVALUATING STUDENTS' SKILL LEVELS WHEN THEY ENTER, PRESCRIBING PROGRAMS OF STUDY AND CARRYING OUT THE PRESCRIPTION.

WE CURRENTLY DO ALMOST NO DIAGNOSTIC TESTING OF NEW STUDENTS. THE ACT TEST, WHICH IS REQUIRED OF ALL ENTERING STUDENTS, IS NOT DESIGNED TO DIAGNOSE LEARNING DIFFICULTIES. ALTHOUGH IT MAY GIVE SOME INDICATION OF A STUDENT'S POTENTIAL SUCCESS IN COLLEGE, IT DOES NOT PERMIT THE IDENTIFICATION OF BASIC SKILLS DEFICIENCIES. ALL ENTERING STUDENTS ARE ALSO GIVEN A MATHEMATICS PLACEMENT EXAMINATION. THIS TEST IS DESIGNED TO EVALUATE A STUDENT'S LEVEL OF ATTAINMENT IN THIS BASIC SKILLS AREA. THERE ARE NO OTHER TESTS WHICH ARE CURRENTLY ADMINISTERED TO ALL ENTERING FRESHMEN TO DIAGNOSE LEVEL OF ATTAINMENT IN BASIC SKILLS AREAS.

A UNIVERSITY WITH AN OPEN DOOR POLICY MUST BE PREPARED TO MEET THE NEEDS OF ALL STUDENTS ITS ADMITS. IF A UNIVERSITY HAS COMMITTED ITSELF TO A POLICY OF OPEN ADMISSIONS, IT INCURS AN OBLIGATION TO CONDUCT DIAGNOSTIC TESTING FOR PROPER PLACEMENT. TESTS TO DIAGNOSE A STUDENT'S LEVEL OF ATTAINMENT IN THE BASIC SKILLS AREAS ARE AVAILABLE. I RECOMMEND THAT WE IMPLEMENT A COMPREHENSIVE PROGRAM OF DIAGNOSTIC TESTING FOR ENTERING STUDENTS IF WE ARE TRULY SERIOUS ABOUT EDUCATING THEM. WE NEED TO IDENTIFY THEIR LEVEL OF ATTAINMENT IN THE VARIOUS BASIC SKILLS AREAS AND TO IDENTIFY AREAS IN WHICH SERIOUS DEFICIENCIES EXIST. WE ALSO NEED TO IDENTIFY THE LEARNING MODES WHICH ARE MOST EFFECTIVE FOR EACH OF THESE INDIVIDUALS.

THE NEXT STEP IS TO PRESCRIBE A PROGRAM OF STUDY TO TAKE THE STUDENT FROM HIS CURRENT LEVEL OF ATTAINMENT TO SOME DESIRED SKILL LEVEL. THIS USUALLY TAKES PLACE THROUGH A STUDENT WORKING WITH HIS ADVISOR. IN OUR CURRENT SYSTEM, BOTH THE STUDENT AND THE ADVISOR ARE HANDICAPPED IN MAKING THIS PRESCRIPTION. TYPICAL COLLEGE CATALOGS CONTAIN COURSE DESCRIPTIONS SO BRIEF THAT THEY ARE UNUSABLE. IN MOST CASES, THE STUDENT GETS LITTLE IDEA OF THE SKILLS AND KNOWLEDGES WHICH CAN BE OBTAINED FROM A COURSE BY READING THE COURSE DESCRIPTION. PREREQUISITES ARE STATED IN TERMS OF COURSES RATHER THAN IN TERMS OF SKILLS. SOMETIMES, THERE ARE HIDDEN PREREQUISITES WHERE NO PREREQUISITES ARE LISTED IN THE COURSE DESCRIPTION, YET THE TEACHER REQUIRES CERTAIN PREREQUISITES ON THE FIRST DAY OF CLASS. FRESHMAN CLASSES USUALLY HAVE NO LISTED PREREQUISITES. YET, IT IS CLEAR FROM LISTENING TO THE PROFESSORS WHO TEACH THESE FRESHMAN LEVEL COURSES THAT THEY EXPECT THE STUDENTS TO HAVE CERTAIN SKILLS. IS IT ANY WONDER THAT STUDENTS OFTEN END UP IN CLASSES FOR WHICH THEY ARE NOT ADEQUATELY PREPARED, GIVEN THE CURRENT STATE OF AFFAIRS?

TO HELP ASSURE THAT STUDENTS ARE PROPERLY PLACED, I RECOMMEND THAT WE PREPARE DETAILED INFORMATION ABOUT COURSE CONTENT AND THE PREREQUISITE SKILLS NECESSARY FOR SUCCESS AND GET IT INTO THE HANDS OF THOSE WHO PRESCRIBE STUDENT PROGRAMS. ALTHOUGH IT MAY BE TOO COSTLY TO INCLUDE THIS DETAILED INFORMATION IN COLLEGE BULLETINS SENT TO POTENTIAL STUDENTS FOR RECRUITING PURPOSES, IT IS ESSENTIAL TO MAKE IT AVAILABLE TO ADVISORS AND OTHERS INVOLVED IN STUDENT PROGRAM PLANNING. I ALSO RECOMMEND THAT WE INSTITUTE WORKSHOPS FOR ACADEMIC ADVISORS. THESE WORKSHOPS WOULD ACQUAINT ADVISORS WITH VARIOUS TECHNIQUES FOR USING DETAILED DIAGNOSTIC INFORMATION IN PLANNING STUDENTS' PROGRAMS AND WITH THE RESOURCES CURRENTLY AVAILABLE AT THE UNIVERSITY WHICH COULD BE BROUGHT TO BEAR ON PROGRAM PLANNINGS.

CARRYING OUT THE PRESCRIPTION BRINGS US TO THE FACULTY ELEMENT OF THE BASIC SKILLS PROBLEM. WHILE OBTAINING THEIR PH.D.'S, MOST FACULTY ARE TRAINED AS RESEARCHERS. ALTHOUGH SOME HAVE EXPERIENCES AS TEACHING ASSISTANTS, THEY ARE NEVER REALLY TAUGHT HOW TO TEACH. WHEN UNIVERSITIES HIRE NEW PH.D.'S AFTER THEY HAVE GRADUATED, THEY NEITHER CHECK TO SEE IF THIS BRAND NEW TEACHER HAS THE BASIC SKILLS NEEDED IN TEACHING NOR PROVIDE ANY TRAINING IN THESE SKILLS. IS IT ANY WONDER THAT MANY OF OUR FACULTY ARE LACKING SOME OF THE BASIC SKILLS THEY NEED TO EFFECTIVELY COMMUNICATE THE INFORMATION WHICH THEY HAVE SPENT SO LONG ACQUIRING?

TO CORRECT THIS FACULTY ELEMENT OF THE BASIC SKILLS PROBLEM, UNIVERSITIES NEED TO INVEST MORE IN THEIR HUMAN CAPITAL. MOST SUCCESSFUL COMPANIES SPEND MILLIONS OF DOLLARS IN TRAINING AND UPGRADING THE SKILLS OF THEIR LABOR FORCE. UNIVERSITIES SPEND ALMOST NOTHING. WE NEED TO INSTITUTE AN ONGOING PROGRAM TO UPGRADE THE TEACHING SKILLS OF FACULTY.

A ONCE-A-YEAR EFFORT TO IMPROVE TEACHING SUCH AS THE ONE IN WHICH WE ARE INVOLVED TODAY WILL SIMPLY NOT DO THE JOB. IT IS LIKE WORKING OUT IN A GYM ONCE A YEAR AND EXPECTING TO SEE IMPROVEMENT. THE WAY TO IMPROVE TEACHING SKILLS IS NO SECRET. THE SKILLS NEEDED IN TEACHING CAN BE IMPROVED IN THE SAME WAY AS ANY OTHER PHYSICAL SKILL; NAMELY, THROUGH PRACTICE AND GOOD COACHING.

YOU DO NOT BECOME A GOOD GOLFER BY LISTENING TO PEOPLE TALK ABOUT GOLF. YOU TRY A FEW SWINGS WITH A GOOD COACH WATCHING YOU. THE COACH MAKES SUGGESTIONS ON HOW TO IMPROVE YOUR SWING AND YOU ATTEMPT TO MAKE THESE ADJUSTMENTS. AFTER SOME PRACTICE, THE COACH OBSERVES YOU AGAIN AND MAKES FURTHER SUGGESTIONS. THIS ROUTINE OF OBSERVATION, CORRECTION, AND PRACTICE CONTINUES UNTIL YOU REALLY HAVE YOUR SWING GROOVED.

TO IMPROVE OUR TEACHING SKILLS, WE NEED TO EMBARK ON A SIMILAR ROUTINE OF OBSERVATION, CORRECTION, AND PRACTICE. FIRST, WE NEED TO GET TRAINED EVALUATORS TO OBSERVE OUR TEACHING. THESE EVALUATORS WOULD MAKE SUGGESTIONS ABOUT HOW WE MIGHT IMPROVE, AND WE WOULD TRY TO INCORPORATE THESE SUGGESTIONS INTO OUR TEACHING STYLE. AFTER A PERIOD OF PRACTICE, WE WOULD BE EVALUATED AGAIN. THIS ROUTINE WOULD NEED TO BE AN ONGOING PROCESS WHICH WAS MANDATORY FOR ALL TEACHERS.

THIS ROUTINE NEEDS TO BE MANDATORY FOR SEVERAL REASONS. FIRST, IF IT IS MANDATORY, IT IS LESS THREATENING. MOST PEOPLE WHO ENTER TEACHING AS A PROFESSION HAVE AT LEAST A LITTLE HOT DOG IN THEM AND MOST ARE HIGH ACHIEVERS. WHEN DEALING WITH SUCH PEOPLE, EGOS OFTEN GET IN THE WAY OF ADMITTING THAT HELP IS NEEDED AND IN SEEKING IT OUT. IF A PROGRAM OF UPGRADING TEACHING SKILLS IS MANDATORY, NO ONE FEELS LIKE THEY ARE BEING PICKED ON WHEN AN EVALUATOR SHOWS UP IN THE CLASSROOM AND NO ONE HAS TO ASK FOR HELP. HELP IS PROVIDED FOR ALL.

SECOND, IT MUST BE MANDATORY TO REACH THOSE WITH THE GREATEST NEED. OFTEN THOSE WHO NEED IT THE MOST DO NOT PARTICIPATE IN VOLUNTARY TEACHING IMPROVEMENT EFFORTS. IT IS HUMAN NATURE TO AVOID ACTIVITIES IN AREAS WHERE YOU ARE NOT PROFICIENT.

FINALLY, THE UPGRADING OF TEACHING SKILLS NEEDS TO BE MANDATORY TO SERVE AS A QUALITY CONTROL FOR THE EDUCATIONAL SERVICE WHICH WE ARE SELLING. IF WE FORGET THAT THE BUSINESS WE ARE IN IS SELLING AN EDUCATIONAL SERVICE AND LET THE QUALITY OF THAT SERVICE SLIP, WE ARE IN SERIOUS TROUBLE AS AN INSTITUTION.

SPECIFICALLY, I RECOMMEND THAT AN OUTSTANDING TEACHER BE IDENTIFIED IN EACH DEPARTMENT AND THAT THOSE INDIVIDUALS BE PROVIDED TRAINING AND RELEASE TIME FOR ONGOING TEACHING IMPROVEMENT ACTIVITIES WITHIN THEIR DEPARTMENTS. I ALSO

RECOMMEND THAT THE TEACHING IMPROVEMENT ACTIVITIES OF THESE INDIVIDUALS BE COORDINATED BY A CENTRAL ORGANIZATION, SUCH AS THE CENTER FOR EDUCATIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND EVALUATION, WHICH WOULD ALSO PROVIDE THE NEEDED TRAINING AND RESOURCE INFORMATION FOR THESE INDIVIDUALS. THESE OUTSTANDING TEACHERS INVOLVED IN TEACHING IMPROVEMENT ACTIVITIES WOULD HAVE THE ADVANTAGES OF 1) BEING FAMILIAR WITH THE FACULTY IN THE DEPARTMENT, 2) HAVING FAMILIARITY WITH THE SUBJECT MATTER OF THOSE WHOSE TEACHING TECHNIQUES THEY ARE TRYING TO IMPROVE, 3) BEING ACCESSIBLE, SINCE THEY ARE HOUSED WITHIN THE DEPARTMENTS, AND 4) HAVING A RECOGNIZED MASTERY OF THE BASIC TEACHING SKILLS THEY ARE TRYING TO DEVELOP IN OTHERS.

WHAT I AM SUGGESTING WOULD INVOLVE A SIGNIFICANT RESTRUCTURING OF OUR CURRENT INSTITUTION. MORE RESOURCES WOULD HAVE TO BE DEVOTED TO DIAGNOSTIC TESTING OF NEW STUDENTS. IT IS LIKELY THAT ADDITIONAL COURSES WOULD BE NEEDED TO PROVIDE DEVELOPMENTAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR THOSE WITH BASIC SKILLS DEFICIENCIES. IT WOULD TAKE ADDITIONAL TIME AND EFFORT FOR TEACHERS TO MORE CLEARLY DESCRIBE THE SKILLS AND KNOWLEDGES THAT COULD BE LEARNED IN THEIR COURSES, AND TO CLEARLY IDENTIFY THE PREREQUISITE SKILLS NEEDED FOR SUCCESS. WITH ADDITIONAL DIAGNOSTIC INFORMATION AND ADDITIONAL DETAIL IN COURSE DESCRIPTIONS, IT WOULD TAKE LONGER FOR ADVISORS TO DESIGN STUDENT PROGRAMS. RESOURCES WOULD NEED TO BE RELEASED IN EACH DEPARTMENT FOR TEACHING IMPROVEMENT ACTIVITIES.

CLEARLY, EMBARKING ON SUCH A COURSE OF ACTION WOULD INVOLVE SOME COSTS. IT IS LIKELY THAT RESOURCES WOULD NEED TO BE REALIGNED WITHIN THE UNIVERSITY. IT MAY ALSO BE NECESSARY TO MAKE A CASE TO THE LEGISLATURE FOR ADDITIONAL RESOURCES. FACED WITH THESE PROBLEMS, THERE IS A STRONG URGE TO OPT FOR THE STATUS QUO. HOWEVER, THERE ARE ALSO SIGNIFICANT BENEFITS FROM THIS COURSE OF ACTION. IT WOULD ALMOST SURELY RESOLVE SOME OF OUR RETENTION PROBLEMS AND WOULD BE A STRONG SELLING POINT IN RECRUITING NEW STUDENTS. RETENTION OF A LARGER PERCENTAGE OF ENTERING STUDENTS WOULD RESULT IN INCREASED RESOURCES FOR THE UNIVERSITY, AS WOULD IMPROVED RECRUITING.

MAKING THESE CHANGES WOULD ALSO RESULT IN A SYSTEM WHICH WOULD BETTER FACILITATE THE ENTRY OF OLDER STUDENTS. OLDER STUDENTS, LIKE THEIR YOUNGER COUNTERPARTS, MAY HAVE SKILL LEVELS BELOW THOSE NECESSARY FOR SUCCESS IN MANY COLLEGE COURSES. A DEMONSTRATED ABILITY TO MEET THE NEEDS OF OLDER STUDENTS IS ESSENTIAL IF WE ARE TO TAP THIS POTENTIALLY LARGE MARKET.

SOME MIGHT ARGUE THAT IT IS NOT THE BUSINESS OF COLLEGES TO PROVIDE REMEDIATION IN THE BASIC SKILLS AREAS. THEY FEEL THAT THIS IS MORE PROPERLY THE JOB OF THE HIGH SCHOOLS. HOWEVER, MANY STUDENTS DECIDE THAT THEY WOULD LIKE TO GO TO COLLEGE VERY LATE IN THEIR HIGH SCHOOL CAREERS. THEY HAVE

ALREADY OMITTED COURSES FROM THEIR HIGH SCHOOL PROGRAMS WHICH WOULD PROVIDE SOME OF THE BASIC SKILLS NEEDED IN COLLEGE. OTHERS MAY TAKE MORE TIME TO GAIN MASTERY IN THE BASIC SKILLS AREAS AND HIGH SCHOOLS ARE VERY TIGHTLY LOCKED INTO A FOUR-YEAR PROGRAM. FOR BOTH OF THESE REASONS, UNIVERSITIES NEED TO BE PREPARED TO REMEDIATE THE BASIC SKILLS DEFICIENCIES OF ENTERING STUDENTS FOR THE FORESEEABLE FUTURE.

THE BASIC SKILLS PROBLEM IS ONE THAT IS NOT LIKELY TO GO AWAY. OUR ENTERING STUDENTS WILL CONTINUE TO HAVE VARYING LEVELS OF ATTAINMENT IN THE BASIC SKILLS AREAS. THESE SKILL LEVELS WILL PROVIDE A POOR FIT WITH THE MINIMUM SKILL LEVELS CURRENTLY ASSUMED IN MOST OF OUR ENTRY LEVEL COURSES. THIS IS APPARENT IN THE LOW PERCENTAGE OF ENTERING STUDENTS WHO SUCCESSFULLY COMPLETE OUR DEGREE PROGRAMS. IF WE REFUSE TO MAKE THE NECESSARY CHANGES AND STILL ACCEPT THE MONEY OF THOSE WHO HAVE VERY LITTLE CHANCE OF SUCCESS, WE ARE BEHAVING UNETHICALLY. ALTHOUGH IT WILL REQUIRE CONSIDERABLE EFFORT, WE MUST MAKE THE INSTITUTIONAL CHANGES NEEDED TO ACCOMMODATE THE VARYING SKILL LEVELS OF THOSE WHO WE CURRENTLY DEFINE AS OUR CLIENTELE.

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